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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003605

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: GOI TO REACH OUT TO ARAB LEAGUE AND EU TO COUNTER
CBO THREAT

REF: BAGHDAD 3563

Classified By: Counselor for Political/Military Affairs Marcie Ries for
Reasons 1.4d/b

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¶1. (S) SUMMARY. In a September 29 meeting with PolMil Minister Counselor Marcie Ries and A/Pol Ellen Germain, a harried Foreign Minister Zebari outlined the GOI's response to the threat of a Turkish cross border operation (CBO.) Emphasizing that the GOI considers the PKK and a CBO separate issues, Zebari detailed a strategy that involves immediate engagement with both the Arab League and the European Union, but includes no concrete action against PKK interests in Northern Iraq. Further compounding the problem, Zebari added that there had been no diplomatic contact between the GOI and GOT since the October 26 visit of a high-level GOI delegation to Ankara--a visit that, according to Zebari, left the Iraqis "uneasy and unhappy" about the "uncharacteristic" treatment they received from the Turks. The only glimmer of hope the Foreign Minister offered was a report that the GOI was "getting good results" on the eight Turkish hostages and expected a breakthrough "soon." END SUMMARY.

GOI IN FULL CRISIS MODE

¶2. (S) Zebari opened by revealing the MFA has established a "crisis cell" to deal with the PKK issue and the CBO that the Foreign Minister thinks is inevitable. Zebari said this assessment was based on warnings the Turkish Chief of Intelligence delivered to the high-level Iraqi delegation that went to Ankara on October 26, repeating several times during the meeting that "if the Turkish Chief of Intelligence tells us to be very, very careful, it means something is there." Zebari made it clear he feels the Turkish General Staff, not Prime Minister Erdogan or Foreign Minister Babacan, are calling the shots on the issue. Zebari said the Iraqi delegation had reported back that they had been poorly treated by the Turks during their visit, and added that there had been no diplomatic contact between the GOI and GOT since then.

PROPOSED GOI ACTIONS

¶3. (S) Zebari said that the result of an October 28 meeting between himself, the Prime Minister, President Talabani and the Ankara delegation was that the GOI had settled on a range of measures in response to the PKK crisis. (NOTE. None involve action against the PKK. END NOTE.)

--The GOI is drafting a diplomatic note to protest the "very disrespectful" treatment the Iraqi delegation received in Ankara.

--The Foreign Minister asked Arab League Secretary General Amir Moussa to convene a meeting to develop a common Arab position on the Turkey/PKK situation. He said Moussa welcomed the suggestion and is organizing a PermRep-level meeting on October 31 in Cairo. Zebari said he hoped the meeting would produce a statement condemning terrorism (but dodged the issue of whether it would explicitly condemn the PKK) and demanding respect for Iraqi territorial sovereignty. Zebari added that the MFA was preparing the statement and would "find the right language."

--Zebari also outlined plans to travel to Brussels to seek an "EU warning against a Turkish CBO." He indicated he wanted to do this, like the Arab League meeting, before the November 2-3 Istanbul ministerial.

TURKISH PREPARATIONS "DISPROPORTIONATE" TO PKK THREAT

¶4. (S) Zebari made clear that the PKK and a CBO are separate issues for the GOI and pointed out that the Turks already pursue PKK elements into Iraq. He said there would be no problem if Turkey wanted to pursue PKK elements in the northern border areas, as they often do, or bomb remote guerrilla outposts in the Qandil Mountains.

¶5. (S) But current Turkish preparations, he argued, were "disproportionate" to the threat. Zebari said the Iraqi delegation to Ankara had concluded that Turkey had other objectives than the PKK and stressed that the GOI was looking at ways to transfer non-Kurdish IA units to the Northern

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frontier, both to underscore the Iraqi aspect of the crisis and to dispel the misconception that the KRG is closed to non-Kurdish IA elements.

¶6. (S) Ambassador Ries cautioned against the AL and EU elements of the Iraqi plan, arguing that it would make a localized problem on which Iraq and Turkey are cooperating to resolve into a dispute between the two nations, and would be interpreted in Ankara both as provocation and a ratcheting up of the stakes. She predicted this course would ultimately play directly into the hands of the nationalist elements.

ISTANBUL MINISTERIAL--GOI PREPARATIONS

¶7. (S) Zebari confided that the GOI had seriously entertained the notion of postponing the Istanbul ministerial because of fears the PKK issue will dominate the discussions, shifting focus away from Iraq. He added that Prime Minister Maliki's attendance is still uncertain. (NOTE: Per reftel, Maliki told Ambassador Crocker on October 25 that he would attend. Zebari went on to tell us "we don't know who's going, the delegation changes day-to-day." END NOTE.) After confiding that "all foreign ministers" had requested bi-lateral meetings with him, Zebari said that a tri-lateral meeting with Foreign Minister Babacan and Secretary Rice was already locked in. Zebari also admitted real concerns about his personal safety in the aftermath of the Iraqi delegation's reception in Ankara, and appealed for "coordination" with the U.S. Embassy on this matter.

ISTANBUL MINISTERIAL--COMMUNIQUE

¶8. (S) Zebari said he sensed the "the spirit of Kirkuk" running through the Turkish draft of the document. (NOTE:

Post believes the a typo in point 1 of the communique ("internally" vs. "internationally" recognized borders) may have triggered Zebari's misgivings. END NOTE) He added the GOI had warned the Turks about any reference to the status of Kirkuk, which the GOI views as a strictly internal affair. Despite this, Zebari reported the GOI and GOT were working together and appeared confident they would craft a communique acceptable to both governments.

IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER'S VISIT TO BAGHDAD

19. (S) Zebari reported that in a recent meeting he had asked Iranian Ambassador Hassan Qummi what Iran's position was on the PKK issue. Qummi's lack of a strong response apparently prompted a call from President Ahmedinejad to Prime Minister Maliki during which Ahmedinejad condemned the threat of an invasion while at the same time noting that Iran had its own Kurdish separatist issues. Following the call, Ahmedinejad decided to dispatch Iranian Foreign Minister Motaqi to Baghdad to demonstrate "solidarity" with the GOI. Zebari confirmed Motaqi will be in Baghdad on September 30.

COMMENT AND FOLLOW ON

10.) (S) Post believes the GOI course of action of trying to persuade the international community to "take sides" has the potential to turn a local quarrel into an international crisis and further provoke the Turks. It also distracts from the needed concrete action against PKK interests. We will be making this point strongly and repeatedly with Iraqi officials.

11.) (S) In a subsequent telephone conversation, National Security Advisor Rubaie told Ambassador Ries that he and Maliki had agreed not to send Zebari to Brussels, but rather to have conversations at the level of the local ambassadors there; and that the message would include the point that the Iraqis understand that until now this situation has involved Iraq and Turkey cooperating on a common problem (the PKK) and they would prefer it remained that way. Nevertheless, they will still make the approach to the EU.
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